

# Greg Laurie: Why the Church Should Act More Like Nehemiah

On this National Day of Prayer, as the country continues to battle the COVID-19 pandemic and injustice, we can look to a biblical figure for guidance: Nehemiah, whose name means “comforted by God.”

Thousands of years ago, Nehemiah was cupbearer to King Artaxerxes of Persia when he received news from his Jewish countrymen that the wall of Jerusalem had been destroyed and its gates burned to the ground. After hearing this devastating report, Nehemiah wept and fasted for many days.

He knew he had to do something about the situation—but first, he prayed.

Sometimes when we look at our problems, we only want a spiritual solution: We pray, but we don’t want to take action. Other times, we want to act, but we don’t want to pray.

We all have something to learn from the life of Nehemiah.

**Nehemiah acknowledged the greatness of God.** He began his prayer for his nation with, “I beseech You, O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and mercy for those who love Him and keep His commandments” (Neh. 1:5).

Before anything else, Nehemiah acknowledged God’s greatness.

The word “awesome” is one that gets tossed around a lot without much thought to its meaning. So, what does “awesome” really mean? It means awe-inspiring, usually in a way that is associated with terror or weightiness.

When we meditate on God’s greatness, we begin to see our problems in their relative smallness but not insignificance.

Nehemiah's problems were real, and they were serious; he was not out of touch with reality. He understood his only hope for restoration for his nation was in God. In the midst of his tears, he chose to proclaim God's greatness and praise Him for His love.

**Nehemiah reminded God of his promises.** Notice how Nehemiah addresses his prayer to the God "who keeps covenant" (Neh. 1:5b). Did Nehemiah need to remind God of one of his attributes? No. God is omniscient, which means He is all-knowing. So why would Nehemiah remind God of something when he prayed?

I think it was his way of reminding himself as much as he was reminding God. Perhaps he was thinking about God's promise to and covenant with Abraham:

"When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, 'I am Almighty God. Walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between you and Me and will exceedingly multiply you.' ... I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you" (Gen. 17:1-2, 6-7).

It was as if Nehemiah was saying, "God, You promised to provide for all of our needs, so I'm praying in light of that." When we say, "Lord, I've been reading Your promises, and I remember Your promises, and I'm reminding You of Your promises," that's a good thing. God delights in not only our reading through the Bible, but also our praying through the Bible.

**Nehemiah confessed his sin.** Nehemiah continued:

"Let Your ear now be attentive, and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant, which I now pray before

You, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You and have not obeyed the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which You commanded Your servant Moses" (Neh. 1:6-7).

As we look at Nehemiah's life in the Scripture, we don't read of any notable sin. He didn't worship false gods like many of his fellow Israelites, yet he said, "I have sinned." Sometimes we pray for other people to change. But first we must pray and confess our own sin and ask God to change us.

**Nehemiah experienced revival.** The United States is in need of a spiritual awakening and a reckoning. But true revival starts with each one of us.

What do I mean by revival? I mean restoring to original condition, coming back to life, so that we might be the people God intended us to be. We are called to pray for our leaders and for the nation as a whole. And while we can pray for other people to change, we have to pray that God would change us. Revival is personal before it's public.

God answered Nehemiah's prayer, but God determined that Nehemiah was the one through whom He was going to bring change, and He ultimately sent him to rebuild the walls in Jerusalem. I'm not trying to compare the modern United States of America to Israel of Nehemiah's day. Nonetheless, we can learn from the way Nehemiah prayed and then acted.

If we desire that God intervene in our lives and in our nation, then let us pray: acknowledging God's greatness, meditating on His promises and confessing our sin. Then let's go out and do the work. {eo}

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